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ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Letter dated 3 December 1993 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I am writing to you concerning the statement made by the Muslim representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Third Committee on 16 November 1993, under agenda item 111, entitled "Advancement of women" (see A/C.3/48/SR.35).

The Muslim representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina has abused the debate to advance false allegations against the Serbian people and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia strongly rejects such unwarranted and absurd allegations.

Those who are truly responsible for the outbreak of the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and who fuel continuation of war are constantly advancing the thesis that "aggression" has been perpetrated against Bosnia and Herzegovina and that Muslims are the sole victims, as though the Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats are not as much entitled to Bosnia and Herzegovina as are the Bosnian Muslims.

Persistently accusing the Serbs for the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Muslim representative is trying once again to distort the facts and present a false picture about the number and the victims of rape.

The Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has repeatedly condemned the horrible acts of violence, including rape, in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. However, it is very difficult to speak only about rape against the Muslims, while at the same time ignoring that similar acts were committed against the Serbs and other ethnic groups. This ushers in the principle of discrimination against the victims of civil war and undermines the whole system of human rights, particularly the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. 1/

The statement of the Muslim representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina represents the continuation of a propaganda campaign whose purpose is to advance false accusations against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Serbian people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Numerous United Nations documents clearly show that, while widespread violations of humanitarian law have been committed by all three sides in the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the number and the origin of the victims remain to be determined more fully by comprehensive and impartial investigations.

The Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, Mr. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, stated, inter alia, in his report of 10 February 1993 2/ that "there are victims among all ethnic groups and there are rapists among the armed forces of all parties to the conflict ...". In conclusion, he also stated that he is "not in a position to make an estimate of the total number of rape victims in this conflict".

The report of the European Community (EC) investigative mission into the treatment of Muslim women in the former Yugoslavia of 3 February 1993 3/ stated, inter alia, that "... there are many and disturbing reports of rape of Croat and Serbian women and children, as well as sexual abuse of men in detention camps ...". It emphasized that "It will probably never be possible to calculate precisely the number of victims involved. Direct evidence from the victims is extremely difficult to obtain".

In testimony before the Committee on Women's Rights of the European Parliament in February 1993, a member of the EC mission - Ms. Simone Veil, in connection with the EC report, stated "It was very difficult to bear witness without exaggerating or falling short of the situation. The delegation had no direct contact with the victims, because of the lack of interpreters ... The report it drew up was therefore based only on indirect testimony".

There is sufficient evidence on an organized and systematic pattern of rape of Serb women in areas under Muslim and Croatian control in the former Bosnia and Herzegovina (brothels in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bihac, Zenica, Konjic, Bugojno) as well as in areas of western Herzegovina (Dretelj and the Celebici detention camps, where women have been subjected to unspeakable torture). A large number of women who have fled to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia provided testimonies on the ordeals and rape they were subjected to at the hands of the Muslim and Croat forces in the former Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many women did not survive mass rape and torture. A number of cases were presented in the reports that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has submitted to the Commission of Experts established by Security Council resolution 780 (1992).

It is deplorable that, while discussing the question of the advancement of women, Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina have launched yet another call for the lifting of the arms embargo. While assuming that the representatives of the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina are acting in the best interest of their women and children, it is very difficult to comprehend how the supply of war material will accelerate their well-being or eventually increase their standard of

living. Peace can be achieved only by peaceful means and through negotiations, and not by force.

The tragedy of all civil wars, including the one that is right now going on in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is that its first and foremost victims are women and children. Their suffering is immeasurable and their deprivations are inconceivable. Words in such cases can help very little. What is needed is prompt and efficient action to prevent a calamity. For its part, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, although itself deprived of leading a normal life because of unjust sanctions, is doing its utmost to assist in providing humanitarian aid to Bosnia and Herzegovina and has so far given shelter to 700,000 refugees, of whom 50,000 are Muslims.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 111.

(Signed) [illegible]omir DJOKIC
Ambassador
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Notes

1/ See resolution 2106 A (XX), annex.

2/ A/48/92-S/25341.

3/ S/25240.